

# Antisemitism in America After October 7th: A Guide to Understanding Anti-Israel Sentiment

The Center for Antisemitism Research (CAR), an ADL research center that advances the global field of antisemitism research, created this resource in an effort to answer questions foundational to understanding antisemitism and anti-Zionism.



**ADL**<sup>®</sup>



# The Landscape

For many people in the United States, the atrocities of October 7<sup>th</sup> have served as a discontinuity in their feelings, perceptions, and engagement with the Middle East. Indeed, anti-Israel protests are taking place across campuses and cities. Debates over whether anti-Zionism is antisemitism have reached Capitol Hill. The topic of the Israel-Hamas Conflict feels ever present.

And yet very few people living in the U.S. know much about Israel, Palestinians and Zionism. In fact, only 55% of Americans have heard of Zionism, according to the first major study probing perceptions of Zionism in the U.S. conducted by CAR.

Why does it matter that many people are in the dark when it comes to Zionism? Because ignorance is often a driver of bias and same is true with anti-Zionism: ignorance about Zionism is one of the most consistent predictors of anti-Zionist and anti-Israel sentiments, CAR's research found.

Those who claim to be anti-Zionist may not truly understand the ideas that they oppose.

ADL created this resource to address the Zionism knowledge gap. It is based on CAR's landmark study "[Attitudes Toward Israel Among Americans](#)," which includes surveys conducted before and after the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel, as well as insights from historians and scholars on Zionism, Israel and antisemitism. This report aims to educate, elevate conversations about Zionism and, ultimately, address antisemitism.

These are painful times for many individuals on different sides of the issues explored here. Education is a critical first step to fostering empathy, nurturing compassion and building bridges.





# Let's Speak the Same Language

## What is Zionism?

Zionism is the movement for the self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel. Today, with a Jewish sovereign state a reality, Zionists believe in and support the right of the democratic State of Israel to exist as a Jewish homeland. Being a Zionist is distinct from supporting the policies of any given government of Israel.

The political movement of Zionism, founded in the second half of the 19th century, is a response to the long history of intense anti-Jewish hatred, persecution and discrimination in countries and communities globally, eventually including the murder of 6 million Jews in Europe during the Holocaust.

Ever since the Jews were exiled from Israel by the Romans nearly 2,000 years ago and were dispersed throughout the world, they have been barely tolerated if not actively persecuted. In many countries, Jews were forced to live separately from the rest of society in ghettos. In fact, the terms “diaspora” and “ghetto” were coined to describe conditions experienced historically by the Jewish people.

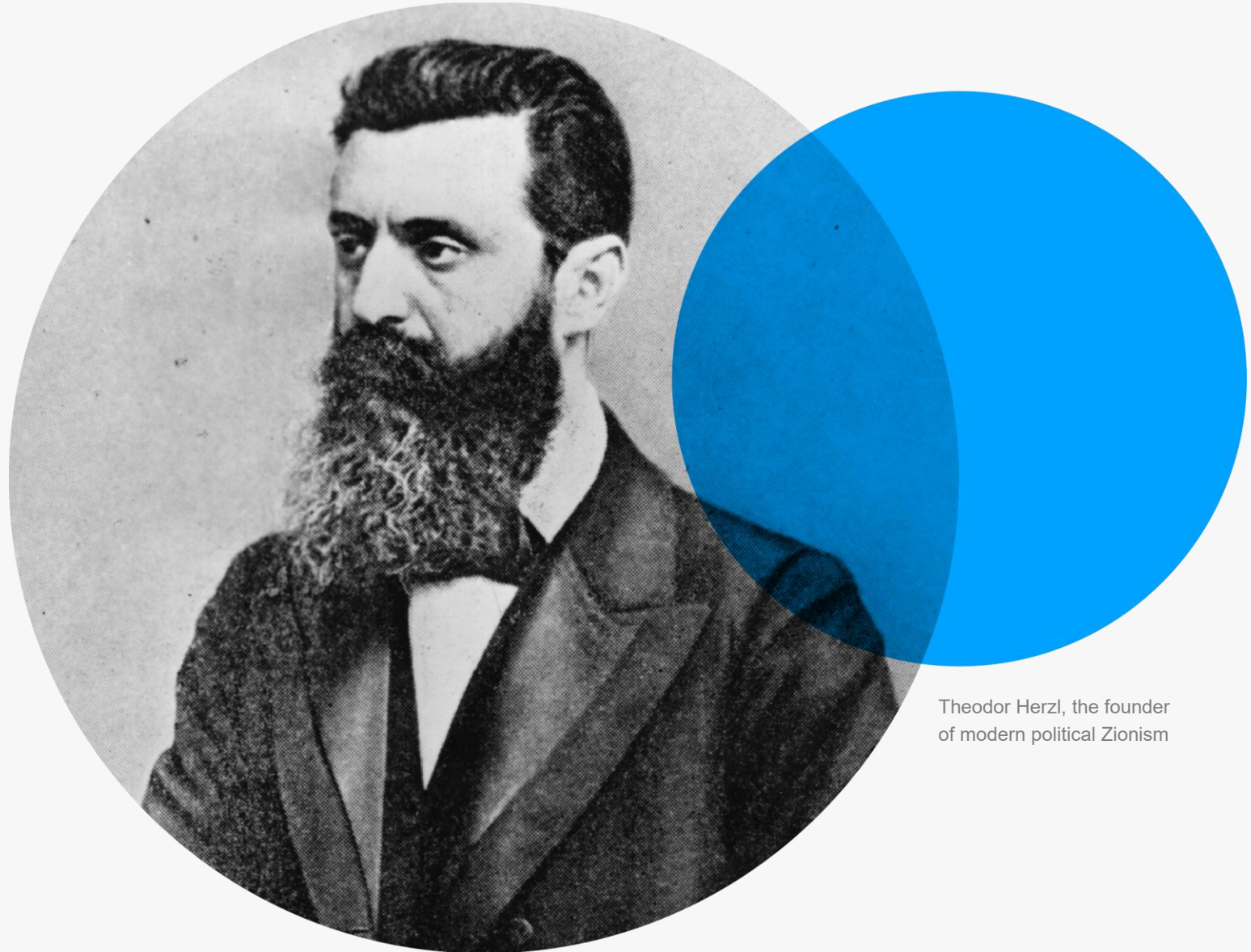




From the earliest days of their exile, Jews had expressed a desire to return to Israel through prayer, text study, religious and cultural practices, but a national movement to build a Jewish homeland did not emerge until the late 19th century.

As nationalism swept throughout Europe and nation-states began to form, Jews were increasingly portrayed as outsiders and were subject to mounting antisemitism and violence. Out of this turmoil and with the continental shift toward nationalism and self-determination, a Jewish national liberation movement was born, one that advocated for the creation of a modern Jewish state in Israel. Central to this movement was the Jewish connection to the land of Israel and its significance to their faith, rituals and practices.

Hungarian-born journalist Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, envisioned a Jewish state where Jews could escape the persecution that had plagued them throughout history, a place where they could thrive culturally and worship freely. Jews, Herzl argued, shared more than a religion or ancestry; they were a nation with a distinct culture and national identity.




Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism

Herzl's vision ultimately led to the 1947 passing of United Nations Resolution 181, which called for what was then British Mandate Palestine to be divided into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, and the subsequent founding of Israel on May 14, 1948.

Extending even further back than political Zionism, Jewish identity has always been tied to Israel, their ancestral homeland. Israel and Jerusalem (often referred to as Zion in the Hebrew Bible) are fundamental to Jewish ritual and culture.

Indeed, the vast majority of Jews living in the United States, over 80%, feel a deep connection to Israel, believing it is an essential part of their Jewishness, regardless of whether they're religious or their views on the actions of the Israeli government.

In fact, many Zionists seek to end Israel's occupation of the West Bank and support a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, 62% of Jewish Americans have serious criticisms of Israeli government policies at last look (JFNA, 2024).



82%

of Jewish adults in the United States said caring about Israel is an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to them.

Source: Pew Research Center.  
*Jewish Americans in 2020*. May, 2021.



# Zionists come in all types.

Some are **theocratic**.  
Some are **technocratic**.



Some are **socialists**.  
Some are **capitalists**.



Some are **liberals**.  
Some are **conservatives**.



Some define **Zionism** narrowly, as a movement that specifically benefits those who fit the traditional definition of Jews, while others see it as a liberalizing and pluralistic ideology that celebrates, welcomes and respects other religions and cultures.



Some are **Jewish**.  
Some come from **other religious and faith groups**.



Some **Zionists** trace their ancestry back through **Europe**, while others are from the **Middle East and Africa**.





# What Is Anti-Zionism?

For as long as there has been Zionism, there has been anti-Zionism.

Anti-Zionism is the rejection of the right of Jewish statehood and self-determination in their ancestral homeland, Israel.

Opposition to the Zionist movement began almost immediately after its inception. In late-19th-century Europe, antisemites labeled Zionism another offshoot of the global Jewish conspiracy, with some calling the movement a “foul Jewish swindle.”

Responses to Zionism in the United States were varied. For example, Evangelical fundamentalists saw Zionism through a messianic lens, believing the return of Jews to their homeland was a precursor to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Others, like the industrialist Henry Ford, understood it through the lens of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and associated it with a global conspiracy to spread subversion and socialism.



Anti-Zionists stand in opposition to Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. Some strive to destroy the state of Israel and ethnically cleanse the Jewish population. Others – regardless of the impact on Israelis or Palestinians – want to see the end of what they believe is colonization and white supremacy in the region and across the globe.

There are also some who label themselves anti-Zionist because they seek to end Israel's occupation of the West Bank, support Palestinian self-determination and the existence of a Jewish country, and ultimately want an end to the cycle of violence. Many Jewish organizations (like ADL) and people do not consider this anti-Zionism but rather substantive opposition to specific policies of the Israeli government.



Protestors holding sign saying "Colonialism" at anti-Israel march



Early responses to the emergence of Zionism from within the Jewish community were mixed too. For many Reform Jews, early Zionism ran counter to their efforts to assimilate into Western society and redefine Judaism as a religion, rather than as a nationality or an ethnic group. Certain Orthodox Jewish factions believed the founding of a Jewish state should not occur until the arrival of the Messiah. Some Orthodox Jews considered Zionism, which envisioned a secular Jewish state, as a threat to traditional Jewish observance. Many Jews also were worried that support for Zionism would provoke anti-Jewish violence.

In the Middle East, Arab communities were uncertain about the issue of Jewish immigration to what was then known as British Mandate Palestine. Some believed Jews would expand opportunities for growth and modernization. But many Arabs feared that the influx of Jews – adding to the community that had been present for the past two thousand years (called the old Yishuv) - would lead to the eventual displacement of the then-largely Arab population.



Jewish immigrants from Europe  
arriving in Haifa, Palestine, circa 1929



Jews experienced both success and persecution during their centuries living under Muslim rule as second-class citizens. The modern era, though, brought more anti-Jewish suspicion in the more European, conspiratorial sense. In 1840, Jews of the Middle East experienced their first significant blood libel, when several were falsely accused of the ritual murder of a Catholic friar. The episode, which came to be known as the Damascus Affair, triggered a wave of violence and persecution, convincing many Jews throughout the Middle East of the need for a place of refuge.

By the 1920s, Arab opposition to Jewish presence and migration to British Mandate Palestine led to more violence, culminating in the 1929 Hebron Massacre, during which Arab rioters attacked the Jewish community in Hebron, resulting in the murder of 67 Jews. Later, in the 1930s, some Arab communities and leaders sided with Germany's Nazi regime and began a revolt aimed at securing their independence from the British. Immediately after the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, six Arab nations invaded the new state.

Jewish prisoner accused of blood libel in Damascus  
Affair depicted in painting by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim





During the subsequent 1948 Arab-Israel War, hundreds of thousands of Arabs were either displaced by the conflict, by Israel, or fled under the promise of an eventual return. To this day, many Arab communities call the creation of Israel the Nakba, or catastrophe. At the same time, rising hostility toward Jews throughout the region culminated in the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Arab Palestinian territory and the surrounding Arab countries.



The signing of the Abraham Accords, where Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates recognize Israel, September 15, 2020

The Arab-Israeli conflict has continued relentlessly, leading to more wars (including the current Israel-Hamas War) as well as to countless terror attacks against civilians in Israel and Jewish and Israeli targets around the world. All these efforts were aimed at not securing peace but in the destruction of the state of Israel. It's worth noting, however, that Israel has forged a lasting peace with Jordan and Egypt and more recently normalized relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan under the Abraham Accords.

Anti-Zionism in the Arab world has been expressed in different ways, from substantive political opposition to pro-Israel policies to violence against the state and its people.



Palestinian refugees, 1982



Anti-Zionism also arose in Russia and, eventually, the Soviet Union. Originally appearing in Czarist Russia in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* fabricated and codified a conspiratorial vision of Jews as creatures who sought to turn the world into a Jewish fiefdom, where Jews would lord it over the subjugated masses through control of the media, banking, and various social and political movements. From its earliest editions, proponents alleged that *The Protocols* were the notes of the First Zionist Congress, held in Basel, Switzerland in 1897, the “true purpose” of Zionism. The first imprint of *The Protocols* outside Russia, printed in Germany in 1920, bears the blue and white Zionist flag on the cover. The U.S. version, popularized by Henry Ford in his *The International Jew*, also stated that *The Protocols* were the minutes from the First Zionist Congress.

Later, Soviet intelligence mined *The Protocols* for source material for use in its own “anti-Zionist” disinformation campaigns as a tool of internal repression. Using the “Protocols” basic schema of a Jewish plot for global domination, Soviet intelligence reimagined Zionism in modern leftist terms: as an imperial plot to install a global system of Jewish supremacy. Alleging an internal plot by the subversive agents of Western imperialism and international finance, the Soviet regime -- and every regime that adopted anti-Zionism as policy -- used anti-Zionism as a slur and accusation against Jews

and non-Jewish political opponents alike. Under allegedly “anti-Zionist-not-antisemitic” policies, in the Soviet regime, Hebrew and Yiddish were repressed; Jewish cultural, religious, philanthropic and other institutions shuttered; Jews were harassed, surveilled, and purged from government and other positions of power; and many were interned or executed.

After Israel's victory in the 1967 war against the Soviets' Arab allies, Soviet anti-Zionism became increasingly a product for export and a means to advance Soviet geo-strategic interests abroad, not only in the Middle East, but also in Africa, Asia, and the West. To sow internal discord among its geopolitical opponents and undermine the ability of the West to form diplomatic, defense, and economic relations, the USSR exploited the suffering and resentment of formerly-colonized and enslaved peoples by branding Zionism as racism, apartheid, and colonialism/imperialism and the West as “Zionist governments.”



Throughout the years, expressions of anti-Zionism have often either emerged from or veered into antisemitism. Critics of Israel have historically used classic antisemitic tropes to describe Israel's actions, such as demonizing Jewish power or claiming that Israel is like Nazi Germany. Anti-Zionists have long held Israel to a higher or even double standard than other nations, singling out Israel for criticism while ignoring comparable or worse behavior by other countries.

Many of these groups have seen in Zionism a version of their own aspirations and anxieties. Such a lens is dangerous because, ultimately, it flattens the conflict of its complexity, distorts the lived experiences of the people there and threatens the development of practical and local solutions to the conflict.



Characterization of Israelis and Zionists as Nazis



# Notable expressions of anti-Zionism throughout history:

## The Arab Revolt

Triggered by a surge in Jewish immigration to the region, the Palestinian Arab community began revolting against British administration of Mandatory Palestine. The revolt, which included violence, political protests, and strikes, ultimately led to Britain recommending the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states.

1936-39

## The Three No's

At the Khartoum Conference held shortly after Israel's defeat of its Arab neighbors in the Six-Day War, the Arab League decrees: No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel.

1967

## Birth of BDS

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which seeks to delegitimize Israel, is launched at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The BDS movement was formalized in 2004-2005.

2001

1886

## Clash at Petach Tikvah

A Jewish community and its Arab Palestinian neighbors clashed violently over territorial claims.

1953

## The Doctors' Plot

Former Soviet Union launches an antisemitism campaign that falsely accuses Jewish doctors of plotting to assassinate Soviet leaders, triggering a wave of antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

1975

## Zionism is Racism

U.N. General Assembly signs a resolution branding Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination. The resolution was overturned in 1991.

2023/24

## Global Protest Movement

In the immediate aftermath of Hamas's terrorist attacks on Israel and the kidnapping of Israelis, a large, months long anti-Zionist protest movement grew around the world, leading to a surge of antisemitic incidents.



# Final Thoughts

The subjects of Israel, Zionism and antisemitism are complex. For those unfamiliar, it's hard to grasp the long history of antisemitism and anti-Zionism that Jews have endured, and the historical, religious and cultural bonds between Jews and Israel. The heated discourse that has surfaced in the wake of the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel and the Israel-Hamas War has made it even more challenging to distinguish fact from fiction.

Consider this resource as a first step toward gaining a better understanding of anti-Zionism and its relationship to antisemitism.

With only 55% of Americans having heard of Zionism – and fewer being aware that it is a movement for Jewish self-determination – more work must be done to better inform this crucial debate.

## The following are some recommended additional resources:

01 Antisemitism Uncovered

---

02 10 Ways to Have Conscientious Conversations on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

---

03 What Is...Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, Anti-Israel Bias?

